

June 7, 2015  
Church Planting  
*Discovering God's Will*  
Acts 13:1-3

**Opening words:** A.W. Tozer once wrote, "*I remind you that there are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn't find it out for many months.*" That quote makes me ask you these questions. How long do you think it would take for us to discover the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from Western Reserve? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be an instant discovery? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be a slow erosion? How many would never notice the Holy Spirit was gone? Do you think the Holy Spirit left Western Reserve years ago? Do you think the Holy Spirit is here now?

This is sermon number twenty-five in my sermon series called *Church Planting*. During the summer months, I have been preaching through the Book of Acts. This is no small task because Acts has so much to offer. I believe the Holy Spirit is vital to our future success. Human effort and determination is not enough to revive the church. It is the Holy Spirit who created the church originally, and it must be the Holy Spirit who revives the church again. With this understanding, let us look at our scripture lesson for today, Acts 13:1-3. Let me call this message *Discovering God's Will*.

**Acts 13:1-3** Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."<sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

History tells us Winston Churchill was forced to make a painful choice. During World War II, the British secret service had broken the Nazi code. Churchill was informed that the Germans were going to bomb Coventry. He had two alternatives: (1) evacuate the citizens and save hundreds of lives. However, that would also reveal to the Germans that their code was broken; or (2) take no action, which would kill hundreds but keep the information flowing and possibly save many more lives. Churchill had to choose and followed the second course. I wonder how well Churchill slept that night. You do not have to be a political leader in the middle of a world war to make a difficult decision. Life is filled with all kinds of choices. Some of our decisions are major, others are minor. Just think about it for a moment.

---

Several years ago, I was in Haiti. I will never forget riding through Port-Au-Prince on a bus. The scene was absolute chaos and disarray. There was no sign of order or prosperity. There were no traffic signs or lights. There were no stores of any kind. There was just people on top of people, on top of trash. The rotting garbage hung heavy in the hot tropical air. The people standing on the street looked at us on the bus

and I found myself feeling intimidated. I spent a month in Haiti that week, and I couldn't wait to get home. My average American life suddenly seemed exceptional. In my opinion, Haiti has no future and Haitians have no options. Their only goal is survival. In America, we have a future and we have options. Our goal is to thrive, not just survive. That is why the choices we make are so important. Just think about how many more options you, an average American, have than an average Haitian. Decision making is just part of our lives.

There is a website, 12most.com. They tell us there are twelve different kinds of choices you make in your life. It must be true, because it is on the internet. This is their list:

1. **Choice to learn** Are you trying to learn something new every day? Knowledge is a choice.
2. **Choices in and of relations** Do you surround yourself with people, or not? How close do you let people get to you?
3. **Choice of personal health** Are you eating your fruits and vegetables? Do you exercise? Or are you smoking like a chimney and drinking like a fish?
4. **Choice of where you reside** Are you going to live in the city, or the country? Are you going to live in the north, or the south?
5. **Choice of personal finances** How comfortable are you with personal debt? Would anyone here take a loan out to buy an RV?
6. **Choice of parenthood** Are you going to have children? How are you going to raise your children?
7. **Choice of life's priorities** What is more important to you, your career or your family?
8. **Choice of vocation** What are you going to do when you grow up?
9. **Choice of time** Time is limited. We spend our time on the things that are the most important to us. What takes up most of your week?
10. **Choice of spirituality** Are you going to be a Christian, or one of the other world religions? Are you going to be a true disciple and strive to be a little more like Jesus every day? Or, are you just a church member?
11. **Choice of self-worth** Do you see yourself as a child of God, or the runt of the litter?
12. **Choice to choose** Are you going to take control of your life, or just do what others expect?

Life is filled with choices. Have you decided where you are going to eat lunch today? However, the scripture lesson for today is not just about decision making. It is about making the right choice. It is about discerning God's will for your life. Have you ever wondered what God wanted you to do in a particular situation? If so, then this scripture lesson is for you. Let's look at it together.

We find ourselves in the opening verses of the thirteenth chapter of Acts. There is absolutely no association with the previous story, except to say that the church is growing. According to our text for today, the prophets and teachers had assembled in Antioch. Some believe the names listed are in order of importance. If they are correct,

Barnabas is the most influential member in that congregation and Saul is the least. They are worshiping and fasting, when the Holy Spirit speaks to them. The divine helper is clear in his communication. He tells the assembly to set apart Barnabas and Saul. They are about to fulfill their divine purpose. Everyone heard what the Holy Spirit said, so everyone fasted and prayed before they laid hands on them. Before long, Barnabas and Paul are gone.

It is a great story, but it frustrates me. Look at the story one more time with me. There were five people present. When the Holy Spirit spoke, all five got the message. It doesn't say that Simeon or Lucius missed it. It says all five got the message and did what God commanded. I find this short story frustrating because most of the time I miss what God is trying to say to me. I am open to doing God's will. The problem is, I am not always sure what God's will is for me. Have you ever wondered what God wanted you to do in a particular situation? If you have ever wondered about God's purpose for your life, then say, "**Amen!**"

One of the things I clearly have in my life is my calling. I can say that today; I couldn't always. When I graduated from college, I worked in the secular world for three years. I hated every day. It all seemed so pointless. I see my calling now, but I didn't go to seminary right away because of self-doubt. I didn't do poorly in school, but I was never comfortable in the academic world. My parents never encouraged me to go into the ministry because they thought I was too social, not academic enough. My life would have been much easier if God would have spoken to my family like he spoke to the five in the scripture lesson for today. God never told my parents about my calling, I had to convince them. The problem is, God rarely speaks in a loud voice. Instead, he speaks to us in a soft, still voice. Add to the fact that it is difficult for God to get our attention; we are so busy. No wonder we ask God time and time again, "what did you say"?

This week I googled the phrase, "how to discern God's will". Countless websites were suggested. Apparently, there is a surplus of people trying to discern God's will. All the websites were different, but they were all the same. A man by the name of Ron Edmonson seemed to have the best summarization. He says you can discern God's will for your life by asking five questions. Each question is biblically based. No question is more important than another; they act in concert. I hope you remember them the next time you are faced with a difficult decision. I hope you remember them the next time you are trying to discern God's will. These are the five:

- 1. Does what I am considering conflict with the scriptures?** That means you actually have to read the Bible. Our country has spent a great deal on education. Use your education and read the Bible. There is no reason you should be ignorant of the Bible. There are some wonderful tools to help you understand. How often do you read the Bible? Maybe one of the reasons you can't discern God's will is that you're not reading the Bible?

2. **Does what I am considering conflict with my wise counsel?** How many spiritually mature friends do you have? Spending more time talking about sports or recipes will not help you discern God's will. You need to cultivate some spiritually mature friends. What do your spiritually mature friends think about your plan of action?
3. **Does what I am considering conflict with the spirit within me?** Does what you are trying to decide bring you peace, or conflict? There has never been a time in your life when you were orphaned. God has always been with you. Which of your options brings you closer to God?
4. **Does what I am considering conflict with my past experience?** God gave you a brain; he expects you to use it. With age comes experience. What are your past experiences telling you about your present situation?
5. **Does what I am considering conflict with my passion for life?** God tends to work with things that fuel our fire. When I look at Bible characters like Joseph, David, the disciples, Abraham or Paul, it appears their calling matched their wiring. Your passion and your calling stand side by side.

The next time you are trying to discover God's will, ask those five questions. I believe they will lead you closer to God's will for your life. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Have you ever felt like your life is filled with bad decisions? Many believe the worst decision in history was made by the Trojans, years ago. You know the story. The Greeks were at war with the city of Troy. They laid siege to the city for ten years, but the Trojans stood firm. The Greeks made it look like they had given up, and sailed away. They left behind a giant wooden horse as a symbol of their defeat. The Trojans opened their city gates for the first time in ten years and wheeled the giant horse into their city. They had no clue several dozens of the Greek soldiers waited inside. When the time was right, the soldiers exited the horse and claimed the city for Greece. Letting the giant horse into the city walls was simply a poor choice. How many bad choices have you made in your life?

How many good choices have you made in your life? Your life is filled with good choices, but the best decision you ever made was accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Because of that choice, you are at the Communion table. Because of that right choice, you are going to spend eternity in heaven. Do yourself a favor and forget about your bad decisions, and celebrate the best decision you ever made, following Jesus! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**